

Legislators and Leaders Honor Mr. Abe Foxman in Celebration of Jewish-American History Month

**DYLAN KASSIN AND
SALONILADDA**

“From serving in our armed forces and government to growing our economy and fighting poverty, from advancing our understanding of medicine and science to combating intolerance and bigotry in our midst, Jewish Americans play a critical role in shaping our country and making our union more perfect,” said House Majority Leader **Steny Hoyer** at the annual Congressional celebration. May is dedicated as Jewish American History Month.

Congress hosts the event annually as an opportunity to recognize the American Jewish community and the impactful contributions to the United States. This year, the annual Capitol Hill celebration was adapted to a virtual setting as Congress paid tribute to **Abe Foxman**, a Holocaust survivor and the now-retired longtime director of the Anti-Defamation League, and a lifelong opponent of anti-Semitism.

While due to pandemic restrictions, the event could not be hosted in person at the U.S. Capitol, the event was just as impactful thanks to the meaningful contributions from scores of legislators from across the ideological spectrum and senior Biden administration officials.

Steeped in history, Jewish Heritage Month was initiated in 1980, first as a week in April, then designated as the entire month of May by President George W. Bush in 2006 as requested by Congress.

This event, in conjunction with the larger Jewish Heritage Month, allows the nation to commemorate the Jewish community as a whole and the individuals within it. The American Jewish contribution has played a significant role in the progress and the success of the United States, across a diverse range of contributions: science, the arts, law and education.

Those who attended the event focused on the common theme of the recent rise of hate for others in America — antisemitic, anti-black and anti-Asian hate — and how this bigotry must be rejected completely in order for America to remain committed to its principles as a nation. They highlighted how honoree Mr. Foxman exemplified dedication to defending against this hate, especially through his position as the former director of the Anti-Defamation League. Representative **Mike Garcia** expressed this sentiment by stating how Mr. Foxman’s “service to the Jewish community and to our nation is going above and beyond” through both his efforts as an activist and as the director of the ADL. former U.N. Ambassador and now Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development **Samantha Power** identified the “profound difference” Mr. Foxman made through “his storied career” as “the defender of the rights of immigrants and religious minorities” in her introduction of Mr. Foxman’s tribute; she warmly depicted “her dear friend,” as “placing at the center of his very being the notion that injustice anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere.”

House Majority Leader **Steny Hoyer** underscored Mr. Foxman’s outstanding leadership, saying, “As the national director of the Anti-Defamation League for nearly 30 years, Abe helped lead



our national effort to confront hatred and end the scourge of antisemitism; at a time when antisemitism is alarmingly and sadly on the rise, the work that Abe oversaw and that the ADL and other organizations continue to undertake is as essential now as it’s ever been.”

The celebration of Jewish Heritage Month is always bipartisan, with attendees from both sides of the aisle joining to commemorate the Jewish community in America, and this year to honor Mr. Foxman on his 81st birthday. Senator **Steve Daines** remarked that “we stand united in our fight against antisemitism, and Abe’s legacy inspires the ongoing fight against oppression at home as well as abroad,” a sentiment that was echoed by many other members of Congress. Senator **Ron Wyden** extended this by commenting on the “sharp rise in antisemitic attacks and other expressions of hatred” in the past few years, and how this necessitates the important work that Mr. Foxman is doing.

This was emphasized throughout the event: Senate Majority Leader **Chuck Schumer** reflected on the “immense contributions that the Jewish people have made to this great country of ours” and how “America would not be the same without the Jewish People.” Conversely, as “the highest elected Jewish official ever in American history,” Senator **Schumer** stated that his success was enabled by America fostering “acceptance and prosperity” for Jewish people.

The event was characterized by many warm remarks and personal anecdotes exemplified by senior White House officials, including Administrator **Power**, in her description of her dear friend, the honoree **Abe Foxman**, as “*placing at the center of his very being the notion that injustice anywhere is a threat to freedom everywhere.*”

In addition to touching on the accomplishments of the American Jewish community, attention was given to the road ahead and the never-ending need for advocacy in light of the rise in antisemitic violence and creed-centered hatred at home and around the world, a recurring theme highlighted throughout the remarks of **Susan E. Rice**, assistant to the President for domestic policy and director

of the White House Domestic Policy Council. She acknowledged both the success and struggle of the Jewish-American population, asserting that “combating the evils of antisemitism and hate requires constant vigilance and ceaseless effort” — a commitment that **Abe Foxman** embodies with his actions. She emphasized how Jewish ideals described in the Torah cultivate the progress of America, and how **Abe Foxman** is a manifestation of both those ideals and progress. “We know that the American Jewish experience remains shaped by bigotry and tragedy, by ignorance and injustice. From **Poway** to **Pittsburgh**, in recent years we have been reminded again and again that combating the evils of antisemitism and hate requires constant vigilance and unceasing effort. Few have taken up that challenge like **Abe Foxman.**”

Despite the immense efforts Mr. Foxman has taken in his advocacy to eliminate hate and the inroads he has made, Mr. Foxman called for persistent and diligent action in continuing to eliminate hate, no matter the supposed futility.

In response to his tribute, **Abe Foxman** remarked on his gratitude for his good fortune in life, “the miracles of G-d” and his belief in America’s “capacity to be a more tolerant, fairer, more just country,” and that “America can lead the world to be a better, fairer, more just universe.” He also emphasized his belief in the “truth, and that truth can conquer prejudice,” as well as the “power of good people” and “Jewish people.” He concluded with the idea that “people are born free of hate or prejudice” and that “words make a difference,” asserting that “we can change people’s minds and hearts” and facilitate unlearning hatred to nurture a better version of America and of the people who live within it.

Several Senators with close ties to the American Jewish community participated in the event, including **Marsha Blackburn (R-TN)**, **Richard Blumenthal (D-CT)**, **Corey Booker (D-NJ)**, **Steve Daines (R-MT)**, **Rob Portman (R-OH)**, **Jacky Rosen (D-NV)**, **Chuck Schumer (D-NY)**, **Chris Van Hollen (D-MD)**, **Ron Wyden (D-OR)** and **Ed Markey (D-MA)**.

A significant lineup of House members also participated in the event, including a number of House Representatives with close ties to the American Jewish community: **Don Bacon (R-NE)**, **Troy Balderson (R-OH)**, **Gus Bilirakis (R-FL)**, **Judy Chu (D-CA)**, **House Majority Whip Jim Clyburn (D-SC)**, **Steve Cohen (D-TN)**, **Ted Deutch (D-FL)**, **Adriana Espaillat (D-NY)**, **Mike Garcia (R-CA)**, **Al Green (D-TX)**, **Raul Grijalva (D-AZ)**, **Steven Horsford (D-NV)**, **House Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD)**, **Bill Johnson (R-OH)**, **Derek Kilmer (D-WA)**, **Raja Krishnamoorthi (D-IL)**, **Elaine Luria (D-VA)**, **Lucy McBath (D-GA)**, **Jerrold Nadler (D-NY)**, **Jimmy Panetta (D-CA)**, **Jamie Raskin (D-MD)**, **Linda Sanchez (D-CA)**, **Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)**, **Kim Schrier (D-WA)**, **Greg Steube (R-FL)**, **Norma Torres (D-CA)**, **David Trone (D-MD)** and **Debbi Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)**.

The virtual event was produced by the **National Museum of American Jewish History** and hosted on its various platforms and coordinated by **The Friedlander Group**.